

Motivations for Obedience

Matt Chandler – June 1, 2014

How are we doing? Well? It's always good to be back with you. If you have your Bibles, let's go to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. It's just June 1, but this month being upon us has created quite a bit of introspection for me on a couple of levels. The first is that on June 20 I'll turn 40 years old. I know I don't look like it. I know I look like an athletic 34, but I'll turn 40.

Then three days before that, on June 17, I'll celebrate my twenty-second spiritual birthday. I've been a Christian for 22 years, and I'll hit 40. If you throw into that that almost five years ago they gave me about two to three years to live, hitting that fortieth birthday hits this kind of introspection in me, where I'm kind of considering life and considering all God has done and all of the places I've been and how the Lord has worked in my life.

As I've been thinking about life, particularly the last 22 years of life, as I've sought to chase hard, follow hard, after Jesus Christ, one of the things, as I've looked through old journals and I've had conversations with people who have been in my life across that period of time, is that my experience as a Christian has been messy. I couldn't find a better word than that. It has just been messy.

For 22 years, I've tried to faithfully obey the Word of God, pursue Jesus Christ, know him, and make him known. What I've marveled at as I've walked through the last 22 years, whether that be things I've written down or experiences I've had, is that I've wrestled with doubt a lot. I have had multiple crises of faith over the last 22 years.

I've had these moments where God felt near to me and obedience felt like breathing. Do you understand what I mean by that? Like I don't have to think about it. I don't have to consider it. I'm just, "God wants this; let's do it." Then I've had multiple seasons where obedience to Christ, obedience to the Word of God, felt like an all-out assault on my hopes and dreams.

It surprised me that it was that messy, because what I expected to see was this happy, skip-rope, isn't-God-awesome kind of 22 years, but that's not what's back there. I have about 40 pages in a journal around when Lynley Herbert died. She was 16. I was a new believer. She loved the Lord. It was my first kind of, "Okay, someone who loved the Lord and was an awesome person just died tragically and out of nowhere." That didn't make any sense to me.

On top of that, I had the near constant friction of fighting my own flesh in a way it appeared no one else was. I want to say this. I know it's true. If you have the testimony that you came to know Jesus Christ and you no longer struggled with X, Y, or Z, then praise Christ, but you're not normal. I don't want to take that testimony from you. Praise God for "I came to know Christ and never desired that anymore. I didn't wrestle with that anymore. This was no longer an inner conflict in me."

Praise God for that story, but it's not normal, and churches' utter preoccupation with that testimony can lay on the rest of us what feels to be an impossible weight. So many of the pages of my journals are filled with, "God, why are all of these people not wrestling like I am? Why don't these people seem to struggle with the doubts I'm struggling with? Why does it seem to come so easily for them when I feel like I'm so filled with inner strife?"

Again, in my own story, and I'm guessing in most of yours, sometimes obedience comes easy. It's just like breathing. You don't have to think about it. You don't have to consider it. You're just doing it. Then sometimes, for me, obedience has felt literally like an all-out assault by God on my dreams. Really, regardless of the season we're in, our motivations toward obedience matter.

All I want to talk about today is what the motivations are that drive us toward obedience, because there are motivations that are not right and not good, and there are motivations that are good and right. So all I want to do is talk about the primary motivation, the primary driver, of Christian obedience, and then I want to talk about some secondary motivations. Then from there we'll call it a day and see what the Lord might be doing in and among us.

Our motivations matter, and we know our motivations matter, because the Bible says they matter. Let me give you a couple of those. Matthew, chapter 6, verse 1, says, "**Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**" Do you hear that Jesus cares about the motivation of righteousness, not just righteousness itself?

That's a heavy text. The text isn't, "Be righteous"; it's "Be righteous for the right reasons." That seems a little over demanding. I mean, shouldn't the Lord just rejoice that somebody is repping him? Shouldn't God just be pleased that some of us are going, "I'm going to do this God's way"? What's wrong with wanting a couple of people to think that's awesome? Well, God thinks there's something wrong with that. The motive behind works of righteousness matters in the eyes of God. That feels like almost an unbearable weight.

Again, even on giving. Second Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 7: **"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."** So it's not just giving or generosity God loves, but a heart that has been transformed that delights in being generous, not being generous either reluctantly, "Oh, I should because I'm supposed to," or under compulsion you come to church, the preacher does a drive-by guilting, and you give.

That's not what God is pleased by, not what God desires. He wants a heart transformed to *love* generosity, not just the action *of* generosity. Are you tracking? Again, this is an added weight on the commands of obedience. It's not just *be* obedient, but be obedient with the right heart. Now there's a reason that weight has been placed on us as Christians, and ultimately it leads us to joy.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. I want to start by talking about the primary motivation for Christian obedience. It's not the only one, so we'll have to do some other work, but let's start in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, starting in verse 14: **"For the love of Christ controls us..."** Other versions will say *compels* us. **"...because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died..."**

For the apostle Paul, who at one time hated Jesus Christ, became a believer, and then became the greatest missionary our faith has ever known, what compelled him in his obedience was the love of Christ. His obedience was a bit different than our obedience in magnitude. What I mean by that is simply, if you remember our *Acts* series, the way the book of Acts ended was Paul headed toward Jerusalem and, all along the way, the Spirit was testifying to Paul that what awaited him in Jerusalem was imprisonment and affliction.

When God is saying, "When you get to where I'm telling you to get, what waits for you is affliction and imprisonment; now let's do this," that's a type of wrestling with obedience that's probably different than what we're experiencing. Maybe not. But what's compelling Paul? What's driving him? The love of God.

How does the love of God manifest itself to us as believers? In the person and work of Jesus Christ: that we have been justified by God in Christ, that we have been adopted and called sons and daughters, that our condemnation we have earned in our glad rebellion against God has been wiped clean, that we are seen as holy and blameless in his sight despite us, that God does not waver in his electing, merciful grace, and that when we are his, we are his indeed, and he does not ever regret that.

If you are in Christ (and that's a huge sentence), you *have* done nothing and *can* do nothing to turn the affection-filled gaze of God away from you. That's stunning, and Paul says that compels him. The work of the gospel, this love of God made manifest in the person and work of Jesus Christ, this love of God that compelled Paul toward obedience, had completely rewired his heart. Let me show you this, starting again in verse 14:

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." The default posture of all human beings from the second they're breathing air...

How many of you either have children or have been around children? Children, by default, are like the seagulls in *Finding Nemo*: "Mine, mine, mine." They don't have to be trained that way. They don't have to be taught that. It's the default posture of their depraved hearts, and we don't outgrow it but for the grace of God.

In fact, the banner over every human being outside of the gospel is "What about me? What about what I want? What about what I deserve? What about me?" In fact, some of you even choose your church under that banner. "What about what I want? What about what I need? What about what I deserve?" This "Mine, mine, mine" is what makes you so miserable.

One of the great paradoxes found in the Scriptures is that the one who wants to gain his life actually loses it, and the one who loses it actually gains it. I've said this a billion times (in fact, if you're getting tired of hearing me say this, I'd check out another church in the area): the more you make your life about you, the more miserable of a human being you're going to be. There's just no way around it.

The more you gladly stay under the banner of "What about me? Who's thinking about me? Who's giving me what I deserve? Who's acknowledging my worth?" the more you live under that, the more miserable of a human being you're going to be. This compelling love of God found in Christ had completely rewired Paul's heart so that the banner of "What about me?" had now vanished, and he had been freed up to live for someone other than himself.

One of the things the gospel does is it rewires how we see ourselves, so obedience isn't difficult under the love of God because we see ourselves differently, because we know God is for us. We know God is going to protect us. He is going to provide for us. He is all we need. That's what, under the love of God, compels us toward obedience. We know he's for us. It rewired how Paul saw himself. It created a type of humility. It created a right way of seeing himself that set him free.

But that's not all that was rewired in the apostle Paul. In fact, let's keep going. Verse 16: **"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."** He says, "Not only has how I see myself been transformed, been changed, but now how I see others has been changed."

I've said this to you before: an experience of grace enables you to extend grace, and where you just kind of intellectually get the idea, you will not show it when it's time to give it. In fact, one of the sure signs that you don't understand grace outside of maybe intellectual assent is the inability to show grace to others. See, what the gospel does is removes our ability to judge others harshly. Instead, it creates empathy. It creates compassion. It creates a holy kind of sorrow for the carnage sin creates.

The apostle Paul says we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, but we don't regard him according to the flesh anymore. We once saw him as an enemy. We once saw him as someone we wouldn't submit to. We once saw him as someone we wanted nothing to do with, but now we don't see him that way. We're in glad submission to his love. We're in glad pursuit of obedience to all he has commanded.

In seeing him this way, it has transformed not only how I see myself, but also how I see others, where I'm now able to enter in with empathy into the brokenness of others. Show me a Christian who judges others harshly, and I'll show you one who understands grace in his brain and has not experienced it in her heart, because to experience the grace of God is to be able to extend it to others.

This is what's compelling Paul's obedience. "The love of Christ, the love of God, compels me to plant churches, to risk my life, to live in plenty and to live in want. I have found Christ to be enough. This is what has compelled me to get up off the ground after yet another attempted murder on my life and go right back to ministering to people who are rejecting what I'm saying and attempting to kill me. This is what's driving me to Jerusalem: the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ."

"The love of Christ compels me," he says. "It has changed how I see myself. It has changed how I see others." In fact, so thoroughly was he transformed he says in verse 17, "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**" The love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ was so profound Paul is saying, "The old me is gone. Past, present, and future, all of my sins fully taken care of in the person and work of Jesus Christ. I am totally and completely and utterly forgiven." That compels him.

This is the first great and primary motivation for the Christian in complete obedience to the Word of God. The love of God is the primary motivator, but it is not the only motivator. There are primary motivations, and then there are secondary. Maybe I can explain it like this. There are a lot of reasons for me not to cheat on my wife, Lauren. Let me list a couple of them for you.

First, I don't think I can do that well again. If I'm straight, I just think she was young... She was like 17, just young and dumb. I was a charismatic personality, hooked her, covenant, she's trapped. I don't think I can swing that again. Secondly, I have a bachelor of arts in biblical studies, which means I'm pretty much in my wheelhouse. There are not a lot of Fortune 500 companies looking for guys who can do what I do. So where would I work? What would I do? That's an issue.

Thirdly, I think it would absolutely destroy the hearts of my children. I think it would create wounds in them that take decades to heal and would affect how they enter into relationship, and that type of carnage is legitimate and there. Here's what I need you to hear me say. Those things are legitimate, yet none of them are why I don't cheat on Lauren.

We just got back from vacation. We were on the beach, walking around. It wasn't like I saw a beautiful woman and was like, "Hey...but where would I work?" That's not what happened. I didn't go, "Man, she is beautiful, but you know what? Where would I work if I...?" That's not what happened. I don't cheat on Lauren because I love her. That's the anchor.

But just so we might always be honest with one another, I have made it no secret that the first seven years of my marriage were extremely difficult. In those difficult days, those secondary motivations were the ligaments that held it together. On those difficult days, where it wasn't, "Man, this is my best friend..." In the days where it was difficult, in the days it was dry, in the days it was dark, those secondary motivations were extremely helpful.

It was, "I don't want to bring reproach on the name of Christ. The enemies of Christ would love to see me fall short of his ideal. I don't want to destroy the soul of my daughter, Audrey." These secondary motivations came in at a point where it was not ideal and there was a lot of mess happening, and it held the covenant together.

Praise God for secondary motivations, but who would want to live there? So secondary motivations were holding the marriage together, while Lauren and I were fighting to get back under that primary motivation of "I love you. You're my best friend. There's no one else I want to spend... I don't even have eyes for anything but you, Boo." We wanted to fight for that.

That's what we want, right? We don't want, "Well, I can't find another job if I cheat on you, so I might as well stay," or "I might hurt the soul of my daughter, so I'd better stay." Nobody wants that, but sometimes that's there as we fight for the primary one. So I'm going to do two secondary motivations for Christian obedience, with the primary one being the gospel itself.

The love of God compels. The love of God constrains, it drives, it moves us forward, but there are a couple of secondary ones. This is one that always drives me into the first: every command of God in the Scriptures has been given to us for our joy. God is not in the business of taking anything from you, but rather, avidly leading you into all the life to be had. You see this throughout Scripture. In fact, that's one of the great themes in the Bible.

Let me read you just a couple of these. One of my favorites is Psalm 16:11. David says, "**You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**" This is profound coming from King David. Let's just talk David.

Regardless of what you're good at, David is just better than you.

How many of you play instruments? Anybody? I mean, you don't have to be good at it; you just kind of piddle around. When David played the harp, demons fled. That's pretty legit, huh? Like you see the exorcist movies, and they're trying all these... David just comes in and plays, and they flee.

That's legit. If we're just talking masculinity here, you don't have a story that he wouldn't embarrass at a dinner table.

Here's what's funny about Texas. Everyone who grew up in Texas was awesome at high school football, and, but for some random injury, you would have gone D1 and probably been All-Pro, but your knee or your shoulder or something happened. So say we're at a dinner party, and someone is like, "Hey, best athletic achievement."

You're like, "Well, it was third down in the semifinals of the play-offs. Hiked the ball. I rolled left. The linebacker was blitzing. I saw the guy. Touchdown. The place went nuts." David would be like, "So I was sitting on this rock watching over my father's flock, and a bear came out of the woods, so I killed it with my hands. Then as its spirit was leaving, I played a little song on my harp." You'd be embarrassed. You wouldn't say anything.

"There was this time I killed a dude who was like nine feet tall with a rock, and then I cut off his head and held it up in front of an army, and that army fled. You want to still stick with your third-down story?" This is a man's man. The experiences King David walks in, from being king to defeating Goliath to even as a younger man killing bears and lions... You have to believe that, at the deepest possible level, holding up Goliath's head and watching an entire army flee before what you just did had to be awesome.

You have to be lying in bed at night every once in a while, going, "That was awesome." But David says, "No, no, no. *You* have made known to me the path of life. Joy is found in *you*. *You're* where life is found, not in being king, not in being married, not in having children, not in making armies flee, not in killing lions and bears. *You* have made known to me the path of life. *You* fill me with joy in your presence. Pleasure is in *your* right hand."

See, the commands of God are all about God being *for* you. The commands of God are all about God trying to lead you into real life. That pull of your flesh toward what *you* want? That's the pull toward slavery, not toward life. At some point, by the grace of God, you'll wake up and see that. So many empty promises the world offers. They don't fulfill. They don't satisfy.

It's important to know this, because there are times obedience will feel like an all-out assault on your dreams, and it's important to know that's simply not true, that the commands of God and the

Word of God are leading you toward life, not away from it. Another one is Psalm 119:103: **"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"**

That's an interesting way to talk about the Law. "Your Word, your commands, they're like honey on my lips." I've never read the Ten Commandments and wanted to lick my fingers. I read the Ten Commandments and go, "Dang, I'm falling short." David reads the commands of God and finds life there. He says, "That tastes good. Your commands taste good to me."

Then, if you have a background in church, there's Jesus himself. John 10:10: "The thief comes only to kill, to steal, and to destroy, but I have come that you might have life and have it to the full, or have it in abundance." The commands of God are the invitation into the fullness of life. In the morning when I get up and open up my Bible at my dining room table and begin to read, the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, is inviting me into life.

"Think of your wife in this way, Matt. Think of your money in this way. Think of the life of your mind in this way. Think of your approach to your friends this way. Think of work this way. Think of sleep this way." There's nothing the Word of God does not bear its weight on. *Nothing*. Every time it does, as difficult as it might sound, God is beckoning you toward joy. Every time you refuse, you, in essence, take on the role of God, and you are deciding, "I know what's best for me," despite the fact that your life is filled with nothing but objective evidence of how crummy of a god you are.

It's important to know that, because there *are* those times the commands of God are difficult. They just are. There are those commands where it just doesn't feel right. If you don't know this, then you say silly things like, "Well, I just don't think God would want [fill in the blank]." It's not based on anything except what you think. The commands of God in Scripture, "Life is this way, life is this way..." "It doesn't feel like life is that way. That feels a bit like death." "Well, yeah, you have to die some to get to life." Secondary motivation: "You have made known to me the path of life."

I had dinner with a group of friends this past week. One of the guys at dinner was just not a believer; I mean, not even interested in being a believer. In fact, he has rebuffed every invitation to come to church. He's just like, "I have no intention of following Jesus. I don't know why I would come to church. That just feels fake to me." In a slight twist of irony, he texted me yesterday and was in the 5:00 last night.

One of the things we talked about this past week was that, at a philosophical level, Christians are hedonists. We're pursuing our joy and the fullness of our joy via obedience to the Word of God. We believe the abundance of life is found in that place. That's a motivation. It's secondary. The love of Christ compelling us...

When we're not under that, when we're not in that spot where we're experiencing grace, marveling at God's love, experiencing emotionally, mentally, in the whole being, a driving toward obedience, then we have this secondary motivation of "God is leading me to life; I need to trust him." I'll give one more. Years ago, we were at a camp called Shepherd of the Ozarks. We did family camp there.

As the guy gave us a tour of the camp, there was a petting zoo there for the kids, and all that was really in the petting zoo were fainting goats. Have you seen these things? When you startle fainting goats, their joints lock and they black out. How these creatures still exist blows my mind. What predator stops at that moment and is like, "Oh wait, he blacked out; it's not fair"? I don't know how they're still around.

Seriously, Google this if you want a good laugh. They're goats that if you go, "Ha!" will lock up and black out. So we're in this petting zoo, and with a straight face, the guy says, "Please don't mess with the fainting goats." You could see on the face of every man there that not only were we going to mess with those goats, but we were going to create a sport out of it, and there would be a tournament of some sort that led to a winner who got a trophy.

Sure enough, all week long, we're startling these goats. We're scaring them. They're falling over. You do it with a timer. "Pow! Four seconds...nice!" I couldn't believe those guys. At the end when I got my trophy... No, I'm kidding. I did think on multiple occasions as we were jacking with those little things that we wouldn't be playing this game if it was any other animal. Like if it was rescued pit bulls, the game is different. Nobody is playing that game.

What happens is when you see something as docile and not worthy of any type of healthy respect, you do things you would never do if there was a good kind of fear involved. I think so often conversations about God move away from his severity and his immensity and the fact that God is terrifying. What court are you going to take God to? Are you going to put God in the dock? Who are you going to complain to about God?

I mean, I know the answer to some of these questions. I know people *do* complain about God. I know people *do* make accusations. As far as I know, God has never spent any time in lockup. There is nothing that can stay his hand, nothing that can stand in the way of his power. He controls all things, from the cellular level to the burning of stars. He controls it all. That is terrifying.

In fact, on repeat in the Bible when men just come across angels, they fall on the ground like dead men. Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on the throne in the year King Uzziah died, and his response was, "Woe is me!" Not "What's up, Lord?" "Woe is me! I'm a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King." His response was, "Uh-oh."

When you make God out to be a fainting goat and not the sovereign, omnipotent ruler of the universe, then you lose a kind of fear, a kind of healthy motivation to walk in obedience to all that he has commanded. With that said, let's look at this. Flip over to Hebrews, chapter 12. We'll pick it up in verse 7.

"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons." To be treated as a son is awesome. "For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.

Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Fifty years ago, no parents sat down and asked each other, "So do you spank?" That's kind of a new deal. In fact, if you're my age, so 40 and above, you remember the day when *everyone* could spank you. It didn't even need to be your parents. Like teacher at school, random dude at the supermarket... It was just fair game. You saw a kid acting up; it got handled. Oh, to just go to the corner and think about it.

God spansks, but he doesn't spank like your daddy did and probably like my daddy did. He never reacts, never flies off the handle, never explodes after trying to deal with it in different ways. A kid will have a way of making you crazy. They'll slowly but surely make you lose your mind and react in a way that's so inconsistent with how you see yourself or understand yourself to be.

I can't believe, with as many young parents as we have in here, I didn't get anything on that. I mean, you just lose your mind over a goldfish cracker, and it didn't have anything to do with that cracker; it had to do with the thousands of things that happened before the cracker incident. Maybe I'm just talking to myself here.

In the end, the Lord doesn't discipline that way. That's not how he disciplines. He doesn't freak out. He doesn't fly off the handle. He doesn't finally just lose it. No. He disciplines to bring about the desired result of righteousness. The Lord disciplines his sons and his daughters, and that's motivation for obedience.

I married a good girl. What I mean by that is the default position of Lauren's heart is "I want to do what's right." I mean, I think she probably got spanked maybe four times her whole life. I did that in an afternoon once. The default position of my own heart was to always weigh out whether or not the event was worth it.

I'd be like, "Man, if I do this, I'm going to get whipped, grounded, and maybe even smacked with an object. Let's go." That's how I worked. When it comes to spiritual things, when it comes to pursuing the things of God, if God disciplines those he loves, then let us be those who rather line ourselves up with how he designed the universe to work as to avoid that discipline or only get that discipline when we absolutely must have it.

There are tons of other motivations. There are promises and threats. God has promised certain things for those who are obedient, and he has threatened certain things for those who are not. There are rewards that come with obedience. There are all of these things we could dive into; we just simply don't have the time.

But the primary driver of Christian obedience is the love of God made manifest in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That unwavering forgiveness and delight is what should be driving us. If that's not where you are, then God has made provisions for our hard-heartedness. He has given us the pursuit of pleasure. He has given us the pursuit of joy. He has given us the fact that he will discipline us because he loves us. He has promised us things. He has threatened us. He has all for our good, for our joy, for his glory, but these are the motivations for obedience.

Again, in an attempt at being real with one another, my guess is that quite a few of us are not in that "being compelled by love" stage. Some of us might be there, and praise God for being there. Those seasons are beautiful. But let's do a little heart-level work right now. To make it easier, would you bow your heads and close your eyes?

If you're a guest, nothing weird is about to happen. Nobody is going to touch you. I'm not taking an offering while you don't look. I want to ask just a couple of questions so we might know how to pray, and then we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper and be dismissed with some worship. Even if you're at Denton or Dallas or Fort Worth, I want you to bow your heads and close your eyes and respond with me.

If you're here today and you're saying, "I hear you, Pastor Matt, on the whole, 'The love of God compels us,' but that's not where I am. If I'm honest here, I am in a desert. I am barely hanging in there. I'm struggling with doubt. I'm confused. I'm hanging in there by a thread. I am exhausted and weary, and I'm not quite sure how much longer I can do this..."

If that's you, would you raise your hand? Don't you dare be ashamed. Just get your hand up. You don't need to be ashamed. The Scriptures are filled with men and women who made this confession. Then if you would say, "Okay, I'm not quite there, Chandler. That's not really where I am, but in reality, I'm definitely not being compelled by the love of God. I'm being compelled out of a sense of duty. I am being compelled out of secondary motivations.

I know you say that's good and that's okay for seasons, but Chandler, I feel like I'm in this spot where, for an extended period of time now, the secondary motivations of a fear of the Lord, the threats of the Lord, and just a desire to do what's right are the driving emphases of my obedience. I certainly would like to get back under the love of God compelling me." If that's you, would you raise your hand? Just say, "Man, it's the secondary motivations that are driving me." Now everybody look up for a second. Here's how I want us to end our time together.

What I just saw (and I'm assuming it's true about all campuses, because it has been true in all of our services here in Flower Mound) is that an issue that continues to persist among us who confess Christ as Lord are seasons in which we walk in the desert, seasons in which we struggle with doubt, seasons in which we are barely hanging in there. If we are not careful, we will pretend that's not where we are and, instead, play the part of "Here's where I raise my hands, and here's where I take notes, and here's when I come to group, what I say about..."

In essence, we begin to pretend we're not where we are. Hear me: that's dumb. Why? Your conversation with other believers, your conversations in your groups, your conversations with those who are in your life pursuing Jesus Christ with you should be right around this subject: "It's dry. I'm tired. I'm struggling with doubt. I don't get this. I'm losing faith." Why would you pretend that's not where you are? I love you, but that's idiotic.

The reason I habitually come back to trying to teach you that the entire Christian life from beginning to end is marked by confession and repentance is that if you get away from that, if you get away from an open, honest, "This is where I am" type of relationship with other believers and, instead, find yourself pretending or wearing the clothes of someone who has it all together, you rob yourself of the ability for the body of Christ to be what she is meant to be, and that is, at times, the tangible experience of God's grace and mercy for you.

So we confess, "I'm in the desert, and I don't know how much longer I can survive out here," and the people of God encourage and pray and they check in and they walk alongside. This is a practice we never get out of. Listen to me: you'll never outgrow confession and repentance. Ever. It doesn't matter how long you're a Christian.

Also, I don't know that you'll ever outgrow seasons of being in the desert. God accomplishes profound things in the dry times. In fact, he came to Hosea and said, "I'm going to take you into the desert, and in the desert you're going to quit calling me 'Master' and start calling me 'Husband.'" That took place in the desert.

What we must learn to exercise week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out, whether obedience feels like breathing air or obedience feels like a full-out assault on our hopes and dreams, is an openness and authenticity to say, "I'm in trouble. I'm jammed up. I'm frustrated. I'm angry. I'm lonely. I've been reading my Bible. I can't remember the last time the Lord spoke to me through his Word. I'm praying. I don't feel like anybody is listening to me but the cat, and I need to repent for owning a cat."

What happens when you refuse to do that is what we're doing here gets really goofy. It gets really dumb. This isn't what pleases the Lord. A broken and contrite spirit pleases the Lord. That's what the Bible teaches. If you raised your hand, or you should have and you didn't, then whether it be at

lunch or as you gather in your groups this week, you need to talk through these things. I think some of the weight will lift in that moment. I would not promise you that all of it will lift.

If the Lord has put you in that season, you will be in that season as long as he wants you in the season. My own experience is there have been multiple times I've walked through that season where I'm like, "Okay, I get it," and the Lord has gone, "You ain't got half of it yet, brother." We need to learn to trust the Lord in that while simultaneously being honest that that's where we are.

God hasn't asked you to be Superman or Wonder Woman. What he *has* asked is honesty, openness, and contrition. So let's be marked by that. Hijack your group tonight. The group leader will be like, "What we're going to cover is..." "No, what we're going to cover is I raised my hand today." The group leader is like, "Dang, Chandler. I studied so hard this week." Great, use that study at another time. It'll be awesome.

If you're here and you're like, "I don't even know anybody here. There are just weirdo strangers here. I'm not sharing my stuff with weirdo strangers." We have weirdo stranger pastors who would love to hear from you and to pray over you. What I'm asking you to do is move on this. Be honest about where you are. It's your only real shot at moving through it. God has given you the body of Christ for such a day as this. You'd be a fool to not grab on to it. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women. I thank you for the times we get to let the Bible read us. For my brothers and sisters in here who are weary and dry and wrestling with doubt and struggling with insecurity and operating out of secondary motivations and not really the primary motivation of your love compelling us, I pray that by your grace, Father, you would alleviate some of that weight, some of that dryness, that you would empower and enable us to confess and to repent, to lean heavily into you.

I pray even now, as we move into Communion and singing unto you the greatness of your name, that you would soften our hearts, remind us of what is good, and that we'd be able to move away from no motivation and secondary motivation and into the primary one. You are good and right to give us the seasons in which that burns brightly, and you are good and right to give us seasons in which that flame is just a flicker, but we ask that you'd pour fuel, that you would add kindling, and that you would ignite once again our hearts for you. It's for your beautiful name, amen.